

Francis Beal
SNCC's Black Women's Liberation Committee
& The Third World Women's Alliance
by phone, 15 August 1997

Q: I'm going to be asking you about---I believe it was---was it the Black Women's Liberation Committee or the Black Women's Alliance of SNCC?

Francis Beal: Both.

Q: Okay, because I saw both, but I wasn't sure. So I'll be asking you about that and about the Third World Women's Alliance and I'll try to be specific about which group I'm talking about. The first question I'd like to talk about is if you belonged to any other organizations prior to your involvement with SNCC?

Francis Beal: Well, I lived in Paris for a little while and there was a group there that was sort of an African American group. You know, I had been coming back and forth across the water, so to speak, during certain parts of the civil rights movement, you know. And I was with a group that helped bring Malcolm X to Paris to speak, for example, to a group of people. I had been involved before I went to Paris with the NAACP Youth Group on campus at the University of Wisconsin and I got in trouble with them because some of the students became part of the Woolworth's boycott. And we were having a boycott because they were discriminating and there was a national boycott going on.

Q: Was this triggered by the Greensboro sit-ins?

Francis Beal: No, this was before that. See, there were a lot of things happening. People know about Greensboro because that was such a, kind of a major kick off thing, but there was, like, this undercurrent going on. Many things were happening and one of the things that happened in the late '50s was the boycott around Woolworth's. What was significant about it, I think, was that---well, I was interviewed then. I was walking around picketing, you know, dressed very nicely and I got interviewed. They said, "Well, why are you doing this? They said they're not a different company, but they don't have anything to do with the policies of down South." And that it's not fair for them---it's sort of the same arguments people use around affirmative action: I didn't do it. Why should I suffer for something that was done thirty, fifty, a hundred years ago? Why should our company up here suffer with company down there? We said, "No, no, that's not true. It's a national company. You set the policies and you let people in to buy things, but you don't hire them." And it was very well-known. I mean, I came from upstate New York and it was very well-known that blacks would not be hired in any kind of a position in which they met the public. That was just understood. And that blacks had only menial---I came from a small town in upstate New York and blacks only had menial types of positions anyway. And I was interviewed and the adult chapter of the NAACP and I was, I think, vice president of the organization, the student chapter and I was called in and they said, "Well, we don't do things like this. This is not our thing. We deal with legal strategy." And so in my mind, it was a mutual decision. I can't really remember if they asked me to leave or I decided to leave [laughter]. It was kind of a mutual decision that we were not made for each other. So I was ready when---and even in, like, '50, I think it was 1959 some students---and then in '60---some students were beginning to come around from the South. Because, again, even though 1960 was the first coming together, from the late '50s on there was this percolating going in the South in various different things from the time of the bus boycott onward. There were incidents, lots of incidents and particularly the black students. And so then I got involved a little bit on campus bring people in and things like that. But my true first activity was really SNCC. That was really my first political activity.

Q: And do you recall when you hooked up with SNCC?

Francis Beal: Oh, because it was sort of informal in the beginning and then I was living in Paris during part of that time. And then I was down South during the summer a couple of times in Green County, Alabama. And then in New York I was a part of---towards the end of the late '60s---sort of around say '67, like that? '66, '67 I was working with the International Affairs Commission of SNCC, which was doing stuff around solidarity with Africa. A lot of people don't remember that, that aspect of it.

Q: So were you---in Green County---were you doing voter registration activities?

Francis Beal: Various different things that were to be done over the summer.

Q: So how did the Black Women's Liberation Committee come about?

Francis Beal: Well, I think there were several different things. Of course, there was this---one of the things I try to tell young folks, I try to give people a sense of the kinds of discussions that were going on. I mean, we used to stay up half the night talking about freedom, liberation, freedom, you know, all these ideas and it was natural that in a sense freedom was in the air. And all this talk---it's like Sojourner says, "What's all this talk about Freedom?" In a sense that happened to us, what's all this talkin' about freedom? And then when people, internally, would do things that were not democratic there was a disjunction between some of these broad philosophical ideas and some of the practice that were doing. And it became obvious in some ways that the---well, the movement talked about freedom and liberation as it related to you as blacks, it still accepted a lot of the premises when it came to women in terms of how life should be. But while we're talking about freedom and change and social justice, you know, it's like a natural thing. As a matter of fact, I have a view that some of the impetus for the women's movement as a whole came out of the civil rights movement so a lot of people used to say, "Oh, that was just a white thing. That's a white middle class thing." But I don't agree with that. This is not to say that there weren't the Betty Friedmans and they had their own reasons for why they became involved, but you know often there are different routes---you know how they say all roads lead to Rome? Often I think there are different parallel developments that come together at a particular historic juncture. That, I think, is what happened. So I think that one of the threads, and the one that I was a part of, was the one that came out of the Civil Rights Movement, the one which was already talking about freedom and liberation and then we began to think about ourselves, not only as black women. And so when people said, "Oh, yeah, but we don't mean that for women. Women should step back." You know, there was all kinds of reactionary ideas began to be espoused by some of the men. And this was very jarring and it was a disjunction also because a lot of the roles that women were playing, women actually did step forward and play certain roles, leadership roles and so on and so forth. So I think that---it's interesting that some of the more radical wing of the white women's movement---the one's that we had, at least, better relations with, had better contact with---came out of the Civil Rights Movement. There were some, of course, that came out of the anti-war movement because, you know, that was their basic thing. But there was a kind of a cross-pollination going on at that time of women, black and white, who had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement, both together and they later kind of separately, who were applying, if you wish, for a more democratic approach to life. And began to adopt, began to assess the world in different terms because of their civil rights experience. So, on the one hand, they were challenging a historic mode of black/white relations, which were fundamentally racist to the core, fundamentally unequal where you had a class of people based on race who had been given centuries of privileges that were systematically denied to a whole group of people simply because of their color, just because of race. And then, when people began talking about men should do this and do that and women should do that, we said, "Now, wait a minute. This sounds familiar." [laughter]

Q: Isn't much of a change.

Francis Beal: Yeah, this sounds somewhat familiar. Although at the same time---we'll get into that later because we had lots of discussions about this.

Q: So were white women---

Francis Beal: Personally, let me just say that I had been married. I had two kids so when some of this discussion began to be raised about stepping back and so on and so forth, it didn't jar---because now I'm talking personally, right?---personally with what I had experienced. You know, here I was with two kids and my ex-husband was not being very responsible insofar as financial and/or emotional support for the children and yet these guys were talking, "Have babies for the revolution and men should step to the fore and blah, blah, blah." And so there was a little bit of a disjunction here between reality and the espousal of these views. So I think that those two things combined at least for me.

I also had a personal experience that impacted my own orientation. I had barely survived two abortions in my life. One in this country and one in France when I was there and--because they were illegal and backstreet abortions and I almost died. And also when I was in high school there were not that many black women who went away to college, that I knew, and it was a big school and maybe I didn't know everyone, but one of those whose name was--had died when she was a freshman from a backstreet abortion. So that had a big impact on me, you know, in terms of--you know, it's awful, you know? The people that were talking about having babies for the revolution, but yet--so I began to actually do some studying in terms of statistics and I was actually horrified at the statistics I found in terms of the number of black and Puerto Rican women because a lot of the statistics I was able to pull together had to do with New York and New York State, who actually died from illegal abortions. So I said, you know, "What about living for the revolution, not just being prepared to die for the revolution."

Q: Right. It's an excellent point. So were--part of the mythology, I guess, of SNCC was that the white women were sort of relegated to the menial tasks and running around dating the black men, while the black women were saying that, "Oh, we're not experiencing sexism and we're given leadership roles." So, what do you make of that mythology? Were black and white women actually talking to each other about these issues?

Francis Beal: No, I don't think so. I think there was a problem, I think, in terms of some class and social/culture clashes and they weren't only racial. They were North/South also. They were urban/rural. They were religious and--deeply religious versus kind of a sophisticated, urban. So there were a lot of melding going on but there was also these other things. It's very easy to see the world only in terms of black and white, but there were a lot of things because, in many ways, people can look back and be very cynical about the times, but I am very grateful to the whites who came South, put themselves on the line because the rest of the world didn't give a shit to tell you the truth, you know what I mean? In many ways I see the Civil Rights Movement and then the Anti-War movement coming after that as a kind of a wake-up call for America's youth. In many ways, we lived very insular lives: blacks over here, whites over there, rich over there, poor over there. Very segregated lives and the thing that I recall about a lot of the whites that I met was how naive they were. When they first began to learn about how blacks lived in the South, in some ways they were shocked because this went against their perceptions of American--"Land of the Free, Home of the Brave"--they believed all that. So part of even, like, struggling around civil rights was to kind of promote a vision of the world that they believed in. But then when they saw the real world was not quite what they'd been taught, they became morally outraged, in some ways, about it. So some of the best youth in America, I think actually, were very involved in the Civil Rights Movement and I'm very proud to have known many of them.

This doesn't mean that there weren't conflicts, however, and there weren't problems because fundamentally people were not used to dealing across a racial divide. So it was--we were all young and there were romantic relationships going on and so on and so forth. So there's all these kinds of problems. But not every single black man was with a white woman either. That's also the other--that's the other side of the mythology. First of all, the Civil Rights Movement was made of vast numbers of black people. And everyone keeps talking about whites, whites, whites. Two summers they came down--1964 and 1965--over two summers. That's the white involvement. There were a few other white people here and there, but in general, SNCC's idea in the beginning was that we would be able to organize black and white because of class type of thing, but we just could not do that. I mean, you can just talk to some other people about what they think about this. There's James Foreman and folks like that. They'll be able to talk to you more about it 'cause I heard them talking about it. It's not from my own--

Q: Oh, no, yeah. [me babbling about radio show, beloved community]

Francis Beal: And the thing about it is if Dorothy--I can't remember Dorothy's last name--but there was a Southern white woman. The idea was that they would organize the white community, but they just couldn't. It just didn't work. So that was part of--that was us being a little bit [laughter]---

Q: Idealistic.

Francis Beal: Yeah, right.

Q: So for the Black Women's Caucus---

Francis Beal: So, anyway, we organized the Black Women's Caucus---not exactly a caucus---we called it the Black Women's Liberation Committee. SNCC Black Women's Liberation Committee. I had done a presentation---we had a national meeting of SNCC staffers in 1969---so by this time you have to understand that SNCC is more or less falling apart at this point. But I had written a paper basically on---the other thing is that we had run into in the South---I had, in particular, run into a couple of women who had been sterilized without their knowledge. And a couple of these women are actually quite famous. I'm not going to say who they were because they've never publically acknowledged. But the reality of the situation was the people would go in and have a baby and would be sterilized without their knowledge and would figure out why they couldn't have a baby. So this was all part of the use of a woman's body for political aid was something that was just horrifying to some of us when we learned about things like that. Part---like I said---part of the thing was---and this is why we were---I won't say, like, confused at the time but it was a very complicated question for us because, on the one hand, we could see women being oppressed and exploited as women in society as a whole and that this was a reality that no one could deny. Whether it was through personal things like your sex life and stuff like that. I mean, some of the beginning knowledge for us was a liberating thing, the very idea. It's very hard to talk to young people about this today because they're so use to that.

Q: We take it for granted, too.

Francis Beal: Exactly. Thirty years ago some of our first meetings were about "This is what the body is. This is where your ovaries are. This is where this happens." Can you imagine? At that level were some of the initial discussions. We felt women had the right to know. You know that book *Our Bodies, Our Selves* was a revolutionary break-through in terms of giving women knowledge so they could begin to maybe control and not be just battered around by the winds of fortune, so to speak. That you can begin to control your reproductive life. You know? Have a baby or not have a baby when you wanted to or when you didn't want to.

Q: So even to have a choice was a new concept.

Francis Beal: Really. In other words, to be able to control that and not being just a victim of circumstances, in other words.

Q: So finding out about these things was what led to the paper you gave at the SNCC conference?

Francis Beal: Yeah. Part of that was, like I said, all these things. So I gave a paper at that meeting. It was held in New York ¹² December, I think, December of 1969. Let me just say it was an outline, notes of the time, and the purpose was to form some sort of Black Women's Caucus or Meeting. It ended up being something called "SNCC Black Women's Liberation Committee" to kind of---you know, we said, "Women are oppressed and we should be talking about this." This kind of thing, about black women. And, actually, people voted for it and they said, "Yeah, well, we should do this." But, like I said, SNCC by this point is pretty much disintegrating all over the place so it doesn't mean much in terms of that it's SNCC's. But in a sense it does, it means something because it means that at least the people who are kind of left there have reached the point where they recognize that there is something around the treatment of women that needs to be addressed. Now there were a number of people who spoke against it and who said---and there were a number of people, not necessarily in SNCC, but black guys in general that we were dealing with said that this is a white women's thing, this is white women's liberation thing, that this had nothing to do with black women, and that racism was the primary thing we had to deal with and this was something that would split the movement. That we were just dupes of white women.

BWLC
rel. to SNCC

Q: And how did the Black Women's Liberation Committee respond to that?

Francis Beal: That they just didn't want to deal with their own sexism. That we felt---we were---we waffled around a little bit, though, let me say that. We said, "Oh, no, no, no, no. We still think racism is the primary thing but this is also happening. We have to deal with it. This is also happening and we have to deal with it." And they said, "Yes, but we shouldn't have a separate organization because that will split the Black Movement." So there's a big discussion, a very big discussion about the independent women's movement versus a movement that would be a part of SNCC. So we had a lot of discussions around the intersection of race, class and gender. Now that sounds common now but we had months and months and months and even a year of discussion around that concept before we---and we never became very---we got clearer and clearer and clearer about the fact that there were specific things that had to deal with women that needed to be addressed independently from the thing. People could not talk about, "We're going to have this revolution and be free as black people, then we'll turn around and take care of women." Because we said, "No. This is not right." 'Cause we also were in touch with people who had a more revolutionary view of society as a whole---socialists and so on---and some of them said the same thing about racism. "Well, class is the most important thing and then we'll turn around---then we'll deal with the race thing." We said, "No, that's not right. We knew that wasn't right." So there were certain general kinds of orientations that I think we did learn that we were able to adapt, but there were also specific things about women's oppression that we were discussing that were very different from the racial oppression and part of that thing was that---on some ideological level we were very clear that some of the first orientation that you got as a woman, about what it meant to be female, came from the family. And that that was a very strong orientation. We would tell stories about little things and incidents that happened in our childhood about why---I mean, I remember, for example, in my childhood when an Auntie of mine who used to take care of us---maybe get in an argument with my brother and my Auntie would say to me, "You know, you should listen to what he says. He's the boy. You're only the girl."

Justification
for BWLC

C-v

Q: And was he older or younger?

Francis Beal: He was older. He's three, two and a half years older than I was, but that made it even worse [laughter].

Q: I've heard stories like that. That's why I asked.

Francis Beal: No, but I remember feeling many times that he was preferred because he was a boy. I didn't feel that much from my mother, you know, but I remember this particular Aunt who looked after us a lot. And people used to tell different stories like that in their families where sometimes there was---like, I remember one---there wasn't enough money for everybody, for both children to go to school so the money was given to the boy. It was considered more important that he get an education whereas, you know, for her it wasn't real important.

Q: So are these the kinds of stories that were shared within the Black Women's Liberation Committee?

Francis Beal: That's right and because essentially the Black Liberation Committee we didn't do that much except talk. I mean, it was---I'm not saying that it's not important. It was because these were all new ideas. I mean, we had sessions on well, what does it mean to be in a white society, to be defined by physical characteristics as your essence. And people forget that irrespective of what white women were saying, it did have an impact on us as black women. So we said---and there were discussions like well, it's very good to say, okay, we should wear afros, which we all did, and we should honor our own physical characteristics, which we said was great, but there was something deeper here. There was something wrong with still accepting the male/female ideas and just saying now, well, beauty is now black and that's beauty and that's female. So there was a, again, we went very deep, I think, in terms of these things and then we did it from an ethnic view. Well, what about a lot of black women who are not built in these, like, svelte thing, you know, big busted, big behinds. And what does it mean to try to live up to this white image type of thing. We said, well, why should we live up to any female? Why should women be defined by physical characteristics at all. So in other words, we leapfrogged it: first it was in relationship to white women and then it was in relationship to women, women's femaleness and physical kind of thing. So there was that leapfrogging-type of thing. So those are some of the discussions. It wasn't like anyone also had ideas and then came and were pushing them. We---a lot of these ideas were coming out and we were able to talk to

beauty
standards/
aesthetics
(black and
white)

each other about what it meant and how they felt. And then there were other things where people did some--well, it's a meeting and I put forward this idea and people just sort of nodded and then a guy said just exactly what I just said, "Oh, yeah, heavy." Like that. So there was that kind of, if you want to call, "bitching".

Q: Well, actually, did you call it consciousness-raising or was that term probably not in use at that time yet--

Francis Beal: I think it was in use because don't forget we had adapted a number of those things from the black movement. That term was very common. "You have to get your consciousness raised, brother," you know, "sister." It wasn't just in terms of women. That had to do with what it meant to be black and to fight for freedom and be an activist as opposed to accepting racism and being like that. That term of consciousness raising was not---I don't know if it came out of the black movement, but we sure used it. We sure used it there. So when we said we're challenging social mores that we had to challenge---then term consciousness raising---I wouldn't be surprised if some of that didn't come out of the Civil Rights Movement. You know, I'm not sure if that's true or not, but that's certainly true about how people saw going in. The Freedom Schools, what we were doing raising people's consciousness, learning to fight back.

Q: I found an article---it just said "SNCC Black Women's Liberation" in a journal called *Women: a Journal of Liberation* and it doesn't have a date, but I was wondering if---I'm sure you wrote a lot of things---

Francis Beal: I did.

Q: ---if you remembered whether---

Francis Beal: Part of our whole thing was not to put our names on things because we were being modest. What was it about?

Q: Let's see---

Francis Beal: By the way, I do have a couple of the newspapers, *Triple Jeopardy*, which I went and got. And---we became---we were already Third World Women's Alliance by the time we were publishing these.

Q: Right. I have a copy of one.

Francis Beal: Which one is it?

Q: It is, let me look at the date. It's volume one---it might be the first one. The copy's kind of bad but I believe it's the first one because it has a section where it outlines the history of Third World Women's Alliance and then goes through the platform. And I think there was a flyer for an Angela Davis rally, an article about George Jackson---

Francis Beal: What was on the cover?

Q: Three women holding a very large rifle.

Francis Beal: Oh, god, yeah. We were a little bit ultra-left then.

Q: Yeah. Three different women. September/October.

Francis Beal: 1972.

Q: Yeah, I think so. The date's hard to read.

Francis Beal: Anyway, let me just say, we were founded in 1969. We became SNCC Black Women's but, as I said, SNCC was really disintegrating at the time. People decided---most of the women that came together when we called the meeting to begin these discussion were not from SNCC so we very quickly became---we said, okay, we'll be the Black Women's Alliance. So between 1969 and essentially December of '69 and one year later we went from that, to the Black Women's Alliance to the Third World Women's Alliance within one year.

Q: Okay, I need to clarify something. In the newsletter, in *Triple Jeopardy*, in the one I have, it says December 1968---

Francis Beal: Oh, it does?

Q: Yeah.

Francis Beal: Okay, I'm off a year then. That's right.

Q: Okay, I didn't know if maybe the newsletter was wrong.

Francis Beal: The Black Women's Liberation Committee---okay, I thought it was '69. You know, unfortunately, I lost a lot of my papers when I moved out here. I left them with somebody in someone's basement and they threw out stuff so I was able to kind of jar my memory. So if it says '68 then that's what it was. I do remember that it was December, though. So that meant between December of '68 and, say, 1970, in other words one year later we were Third World Women's Alliance. And we had a little debate about that and I'll go into that when we get into that discussion. You know, some ideological debates.

Q: Okay, why don't you tell me about that now.

Francis Beal: Oh, okay. What happened was we were all black and we were the Black Women's Alliance and what happened was we were approached by two or three women who were Puerto Rican and they said that there was nothing like this in the Puerto Rican community and they would like to join with us in our organization. So we had a big---actually it became a big debate in the organization and some people felt that the problem---we were dealing a lot with this intersection of race and gender. I mean, we didn't necessarily use those terms but we were oppressed and yet we were oppressed by people who were oppressed-type of thing. So this was a dynamic that we were trying to struggle through at the time because it wasn't this clear cut thing: white versus black or male versus female. We had all these conflicting things going on here, these intersecting things that we were trying to figure out how they impacted on each other. So with the Puerto Rican sisters their whole thing was---a lot of them were women who were involved in the Puerto Rican independence movement so they had the whole thing of being oppressed by a U.S. colonial power. At the same time, they were women and then they were being---so we saw the sort of being involved with people from the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, a number of them were or some other Puerto Rican---radical Puerto Rican organization, but they didn't have any women's things going. So there were some women in our organization felt that this situation of black women was so unique and so special historically and currently that we should not unite with anybody else. At least not in terms of our organization. That's the difference between that and being allies and working on things with people.

BWA to
TWWA
(other women
of color)

Another view was that the complexities of intersecting oppressions was more [inaudible---resilient?] than the distinctions of the particular social groups and that given the fact that there was no other thing---that there was no other group for these women to be involved in---that we should be open to our Puerto Rican sisters to join with us. So this became a big debate and there were a few women---and the line that we should be more open to them won out. And when that happened one of the sisters, a black sister by the way, Keisha said, "Well, I think we should change the name of our organization to reflect the membership. You know what I mean? We've decided to do this so we should go ahead and change the name of the organization." And so people said---so then there was a big debate: revolutionary, socialist. "Are we socialist, are we not socialist? We should say we're revolutionary women, radical women" blah, blah, blah. But we said, "No, let's just---we'll describe---we'll be descriptive. People will know who we are by what

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①

name debate
socialist?
radical?

we do, not by what we call ourselves." So we were then the Third World Women's Alliance. I'm glad we weren't some crazy, you know, "Radical Communists" blah, blah, blah.

Q: Well, I think the little woman sign with the fist with the rifle would depict what you were about.

Francis Beal: Yeah, well, we were talking about all kinds of crazy stuff [laughter]. But, fundamentally, I think we made some important contributions in terms of breakthrough because one of the ideological---so anyway, that was an internal ideological fight, but we, don't forget, even to found ourselves as an organization we had a lot of fights with guys who raised this question about being divisive to the movement and we said no. Our position was that we feel oppressed under these circumstances, you don't take us seriously. It is more divisive not to take up the question of us being oppressed. You understand what I'm saying? In other words, that's what's divisive: the existence of sexism and inequality is what's divisive, not the fight against it. And that if your resistance to being a true democrat, which is the problem and not the fact that we raised the question, what's divisive is existence of the problem. Again, I'm saying the same thing.

Sexism
as divisive,
not raising
the issue.

Q: And so did that settle it for the group?

Francis Beal: Well, that was our position, you know what I mean? But I'm saying is---what happens is in the beginning people are vociferous against us, you know? And then you had Baraka and all those guys over there in CAP [?], you know, over in Newark talking about having babies for the revolution. I mean, women used to have to come in and bow down to him. You know, the Nationalists? I'm serious. This is some serious stuff, honey. This is some serious *mea culpa, mea nothing*, you know, kind of thing. Some people said, "No, no, no, no." And then some people felt like they had had experience in SNCC and they had stood up to Alabama State cops and Louisiana State cops and they were not going to lie and become dirt rugs for which people should [inaudible]. So, you know, there was all this ideology going on about women and Monahan's [Daniel Patrick Moynihan] thing about well, black women have always been free and they've helped oppress black men. It was pretty heavy stuff where black women---you know, "the only people who've been free in this country have been black men and white women." That was the, kind of a mythology that was out there. So part of the whole thing was to talk about how black women were oppressed and exploited relative to society, how this was not something that was chosen to do---sexual exploitation.

So we did a lot of reading, went back into trying to find our history that way, some of the stuff that we first discovered was books like---things about Harriet Tubman. I mean, none of these things were known. We had to find them. Poetry, poems we found written by---what's that woman's name? She was a feminist, too. One of my favorites was---you know, my mind is going now. I just can't remember all these things. There was a woman who was an anti-lynching person.

reclamation
of history

Q: Oh, Ida B. Wells?

Francis Beal: Yeah. She walked around, I guess it was Memphis, with two guns strapped on her hips because her life was threatened because she owned a newspaper and she was using the newspaper as an anti-lynching thing. And her life had been threatened so she walked around with a gun on her hip, so we liked that.

Q: And I believe she, yeah, she said every black home should have a Smith & Wesson. Okay, about how many members do you recall having when you first started out?

Francis Beal: Well, in the beginning it started small. We were maybe eight or ten people and then it grew and grew and grew and I think at its height, in New York at least, we had about---oh, god. See, it depended. We had people coming---we had certain meetings where we had like 50 to 100 people sometimes at those meetings. So we had quite a number of people, but then there was, like, a periphery of people there. For example, I remember we had a demonstration that we called when Kabral [first name?] was murdered by the Portugeuse, was assassinated and we called around. There were about 500 women who showed up, but

those weren't all, like, members of the organization. But we had---you know when you called things lots of people showed up. Those were the days when people were in motion.

[end of side 1]

So, getting back to some of the ideological things---I know this thing is just going in all different directions. There were some ideological words we had with men for the very right to exist, to say that there was oppression that existed and that it was bad and that men participated in that oppression and this was not good. That violence against women was not an acceptable behavior for men who called themselves revolutionary. You can't talk about changing society for one half of the population, you have to talk about--if you're going to change it, you're going to change it for good for everybody. And that's part of the thing of putting all of those things of what we want together because this gave a broad philosophical view of how we thought a woman's life could be liberated. I mean, that was what's important about that program. That's a program of a vision of a world that was free from sexism as far as we were concerned.

Q: So what were the forums for these ideological discussions you'd have with men? Did you have certain activities or did they crash your meetings to discuss this?

Francis Beal: Yes, sometimes it was done on a personal level and sometimes it was done in terms of forum. I remember the first time I was invited by a group of---some of them were Muslims or Muslim-influenced up in Harlem to come speak about abortion rights [laughter]. And I'll never forget that meeting because it was the first time I had ever spoken in mixed group, mixed meaning "men", I mean in a public thing as a women's activist. And I'll never forget going up the stairs and just saying, "You faced down Alabama State cops. You can do this, you can do this, you can do it." I was really scared. I was really scared but when I started speaking I'd never show it. And they started out really rough on me, but I was no fool. I really talked about how many black women had been killed in abortion rights and that---talk about having babies for the revolution, but if women are dying all over the place, you know, from these backstreet abortions and then what kind of children if you have one baby after the other? And what about men helping out with these babies? That kinds of thing. So they weren't too badly on me but I'll never forget two different women as I made my way out of this crowded place up in Harlem, a woman very quietly said to me, "Right on. Right on." Like whispered it to me. And one before I went out said, "Boy, I'm glad you said what you said." They would not speak up, you know, amongst that group and I realized how important the work we were doing at that time, Kimberly, because I realized that we were speaking for women who were not prepared to speak for themselves yet and that was an important role that the Third World Women's Alliance was playing at that point. That---there was a lot of, "Well, if I speak up, they'll go. They'll get white women. They'll get some other woman. They'll think I'm a Sapphire." You know, there's all this kind of talk about being nasty and then black---black men could be nasty, too. You know, they'd turn around and say, "Well, that's the reason we go with white women 'cause they treat us better. You treat us bad." You know, we said, "Fuck you." [laughter] You go with them because they're an easy screw. Some of it was really raunchy. You know what I mean? It was not all at some level of, you know what I'm saying? You look at it thirty years later and you want it to be all this philosophical and clean and righteous. You know what I mean? And it wasn't always. Some of it was pretty raunchy. So there were---we used, like, *Triple Jeopardy* to take up some of these debates.

Q: Do you remember how many issues you had?

Francis Beal: I think we published for about four years. I started to talk about this ideological thing. There was that debate, right, that went on? We had this internal debate amongst women around whether we should be Third World or just Black organization. And I think that was a very important discussion in the organization. Then we used to have some debates with---we used to go around and speak at the various colleges and universities and amongst other people there and some of these debates just went on through people responding to some of the things that we wrote. There was just a lot of---it's hard to describe the nature of how the interaction went on because people were discussing things. It's hard to describe---the only thing I can describe it to you---I'm not sure what your freshman year in college was like, but I came from a place where you didn't have very big intellectual discussions in high school to college where all of these things were being discussed, you know? Did God exist? To me it was like that, what life was like. I

mean, people were just challenging and discussing and everybody was politically involved. Everyone had a point of view and they were prepared to discuss it with you, you know what I mean? I remember having big shouting matches with my brothers over family dinners and things like that and a lot of people had those kinds of things going on. On my job---I forgot to mention to you I worked for the National Council of Negro Women. I went there with something called "Project WomanPower" whose purpose was to try to organize women all around the country. I became the editor of their newsletter, *The Black Woman*. I worked for ol' Dorothy Height for ten years.

Q: Do you remember what years that was?

Francis Beal: Let's see. I went there I think was in '66. Wait, '67. 1967. - 1977?

Q: So you were doing the SNCC International Affairs Commission at the same time?

Francis Beal: Yes, exactly.

Q: And then SNCC was starting to peter out while you were still working for---

Francis Beal: Right. Yeah, I worked. See that was my job. My job was the National Council of Negro Women, but we had, I think, we had a big influence there. What they did with Project WomanPower was they hired people from SNCC to be organizers and to work on this project that they had.

Q: Okay. Thanks for that. So did you know Jane Galvin-Lewis while you were working there? She was with the National Black Feminist Organization.

Francis Beal: Oh, yes, I do know---now that you mention it. I remember. They were a little bit---we were, let me just tell you, we considered ourselves the upholders, I mean we called it "triple jeopardy", you know what I mean? 'Cause we believed---because we were trying very hard to deal with the implications of the woman question as it relates to race and class. We could never figure out, however, we were constantly thinking, "Are we the feminist arm of the black liberation---of the anti-racist movement? Are we the anti-racist arm of the women's movement?" These are questions that we would pose to ourselves and I don't think we ever quite came up with an answer.

Q: No one ever said, "both"?

Francis Beal: Yes. No, we said, "Well, we do that." I mean, there were arguments for either way 'cause we did that. But people---we also had a very strong class orientation. We were very pro-working class and we really had a very big sentiment around poor women. And while we thought it was important to struggle to get women of color into professional schools and to fight at that---at those levels, we felt that that was not sufficient in order to really serve the masses of black women in this country who were of working class background. So in that regard we saw ourselves as very different from the National Black Feminist Organization, who we thought were very---first of all, we felt uncomfortable in that stage of our development with the word "feminist". Very uncomfortable because we thought people were trying to make that into a whole ideology in and of itself without taking into account race and class. And that---so we felt uncomfortable with saying "feminist" as if that was an ideological world in and of itself. And many of us felt that was too connected at that time with a view that saw men, just men *per se* as the enemy. And the problem of all the things rather than any kind of analysis of the role of female oppression and exploitation played in terms of a society---capitalism, of an unjust society. So we felt very uncomfortable even that terminology. I feel much more comfortable with it now, except at that time you used to split hairs more. And we said, "If what you mean is the liberation of women, the complete liberation of women," you know, because we talked about, you know women are oppressed on many fronts: in the home, in society-at-large, and as citizens. In other words, on the job and in society-at-large. We used to always talk about the levels of oppression that women faced and there's this concept of a "double job". Being oppressed, you know, first of all your having to work all day and then go home and have another job to face. All this was the nature of many of the discussions that we were having at that time. So it's amusing for me to kind of look at some of the things that we talked about very politically because this is what we were facing and

what we were trying to address from a political level and now just seeing many people in academia dealing with a number of these things. You know, the whole thing of the feminization of poverty. All of those kinds of questions are things that we were dealing with in a political realm.

I think the most important thing that the Third World Women's Alliance in New York accomplished, however, was we united with a number of other women. Something called "The Coalition Against Sterilization Abuse" and because we discovered that there was some abuse, first of all amongst Puerto Rican women---a lot of sterilization abuse going on---and amongst Black women. And then when we found out that a lot of this was going on in the city of New York, we united with a number of other progressive women, radical women, white women, the Puerto Rican women, black women, and the Third World Women's Alliance and we essentially did a concerted assault on the City Council. And we went before a sub-committee, I testified, talking about our concerns about---the purpose of it was not to deny women sterilization if that was their choice, but to make sure that if a woman chose to be sterilized it was with informed consent. First of all, that consent was necessary, but more than consent, that it would be informed consent. That means people would understand what was happening and why. First of all, you couldn't have a woman coming out of ether, just having a baby and stick a piece of paper in front of her and say, "You wanna sign this? You don't want to have another baby, do you?"

Q: Just put an "X".

Francis Beal: Right. Exactly. That kind of stuff. And we got certain kind of things. Helen---what was her name? Dr. Helen Rodriguez was very active with us in that process. So we united not only with activist-types, but also with people who were---doctors and nurses and people in the health field.

Q: Do you remember what year that was, particularly the testimony that you gave?

Francis Beal: See this is where the loss of my papers is so terrible. I moved out here in 1980 so I think it was, like, '74 or '5, something like that.

Q: And do you remember the names of a few of the groups that you were working with in the coalition?

Francis Beal: There was this woman---there was CASA and there was a larger group, too. Coalition to End---there was CASA, which is Coalition Against Sterilization Abuse and then there was a larger group. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. But it was in New York. Like I said, I testified before a sub-committee and they eventually adopted regulations which had to do with making sure that sterilization was informed consent. And we felt that that was the most important concrete victory in terms of women's freedom that we accomplished in New York. I mean, we did a lot of other things. We had a little theatre group that used to go around and do little kinds of skits, you know.

self sisters
1973

Q: What kind of---skits about what?

Francis Beal: Well, you know, we used to play male and female roles and make jokes. You know, have you ever heard of the Mime Troupe here? It's sort of like political theatre. We'd make up skits, you know, and dress up and, you know, act like jerks. You know, set up a straw man and knock him down.

Q: Was it called the "Third World Women's Alliance Theatre Group"?

Francis Beal: Yeah, something like that. It wasn't, like, a professional things, but we would go around and we would sometimes do these skits and sometimes people would laugh. What was interesting was it was very different in the beginning when we were fighting even among so-called revolutionary-minded men. But as they began to---we were very impacted also by our revolutionary sisters in Africa. You know, how the women, not only in Vietnam, but also in Africa were dealing with these questions. Women in NPLA [?], women from Angola, women from South Africa. We met with them and we were very, like I said, very impacted by and very influenced by some of the women in Cuba. For example, this is one of the things that opened us up to socialist ideas, you know, 'cause we saw---I went to Cuba in 1972 and while I was there one of the women I met was this woman, she must have been at that time about forty-two, forty-three years

old and she said to me that she felt she owed everything to the revolution. Everything. Very dark-skinned black woman, like I said, she was a sargent in the army. She said---she feels that she's only thirteen years old because she only began to live when the revolution came. She said before that she couldn't read, she couldn't write, she was just completely ignorant. She worked as a domestic servant. And then, with tears in her eyes she told me, "My daughter's going to medical school. Medical school! Can you imagine?" It was, like, you know. Which doesn't mean there weren't some racial problems and certainly some problems around sexism in Cuba, but we could see that a thorough, fundamental revolutionary change was absolutely at the heart of what was kind of necessary. Some of us became even more radical. I started to say that's the reason the black women's feminist organization, we sort of looked at with disdain. We thought they were really pretty much only concerned with black, professional women.

Q: Particularly, in the U.S.?

Francis Beal: Yeah. And not with, you know, for example we were very---and we had a broader vision of what the liberation movement stood for. So there were some people who were more feminist-oriented, which we were in saying---thinking of women's liberation in terms of being explicitly women. Whereas there were a number of women that were involved in a number of activities, and by virtue of who they were, it was also a part, we thought, as a part of the women's liberation movement. Because they were women in action trying to liberate themselves from the injustices. So we thought that the welfare rights organization, remember, was a part of the women's movement. Now this was another debate we had with some of the other white women who we saw had a more narrow view unless they were doing this as a part "as women". We said, "Yeah, but who's on welfare." Give us a break. They're fighting for welfare rights and fighting for---at that point there was the kind of thing where, you know, jobs or minimum amount money to live on. So there were a lot of those kinds of debates. And then there were debates around is work in the home "real work"? If it is, should women be paid for it or not be paid for it. Like I said, it was a very, very rich, theoretical, political debates and discussions that went on during that period.

Q: But it also sounds like this was one of the groups that didn't get bogged down with the theory, but also did some action and did activities, which it sounds like you did.

Francis Beal: Oh, yeah. We did a lot of educational work, let me just tell you. Because I think that came out of our SNCC experience where we knew that the consciousness-raising thing was very important relative to getting people up. The other thing was we knew that women---we really believed that having a women's group with help was important in terms of training women to take leadership roles because they had to come up with agendas. We put out our own newspaper. We did our own typesetting. I mean, people were actually learning a lot of things that they would not necessarily have done if we had a male and female thing.

Q: So was it a more democratic structure? Did you work by committees or by---

Francis Beal: It was but we really were "ultra-democratic" if you ask me. I mean, we didn't have a president *per se*. We had, like, a steering committee that kind of ran things, but we were a part of our period. Don't forget SNCC was like that, too. Tried to work by consensus-type of thing and it was only in one or two cases where we had to go to a vote when they were like different points of view where---it had to do with policy questions and the one that I recall was the one around when we went from being "Black" to being "Third World". Now the reality is we were basically Black and Puerto Rican because we had very few Asians in the group, but once we started a chapter out here [Bay Area] it was more Asian and Black. Very few Latinos. Which I thought was interesting.

Q: When you moved to---

Francis Beal: Not me. A chapter---a woman moved from New York and she helped start a chapter out here. I think there was a chapter in Washington State for a hot minute there. But the only two that actually developed, even though there were a number of women who were---like, at the founding meeting there were some women from L.A., there were some women from Detroit. I remember Gwen Patton who's now in Montgomery, Alabama, she was at that meeting.

Q: Was she involved with the Alliance?

Francis Beal: Yeah. Well, she was at the founding meeting at the conference. We had that meeting when we, like, the founding meeting she was involved. I think she was living in D.C. at the time. You know Gwen Patton?

Q: I met her through the radio project.

Francis Beal: Well, you should ask her because I worked with something called NBWADO^U---the National Black Anti-War Anti-Draft Union. We were doing anti-draft stuff. We called it NBWADO^U---you know, you wanted to try everything to sounds African [laughter].

Carson,
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Q: Do you remember the name of the person who started the Bay Area chapter?

Francis Beal: I know the people that became sort of---I know Linda Burnham became a very important figure there. The person who started it was---yes, I see her face right in front of me. Cheryl. Cheryl Johnson, Perry? What's her last name now? She's married to somebody else. Her I'm still in touch with, though. Her I still see very now and then. If I had to I can track her down. And I actually have the names and addresses of a few other people that I can give you, who I haven't seen in twenty five or thirty years, but I ran into in the subway last year. One of the women. And they can talk to you a little bit about the Third World Women's Alliance.

Q: Okay, that would be great. You talked some about coalition work. Do you recall having any particular allies that you worked with a lot. I don't know if you had any government allies or women who worked in government or other feminist groups.

Francis Beal: Don't forget at that time there was no such animal.

Q: Right.

Francis Beal: We had not yet grown to the point where we actually could elect people. There were hardly any blacks in government at that time.

Q: Even at the local level?

Francis Beal: Well, a few at the local level, but not really. We had no---I think Adam Clayton Powell was it.

Q: So then I guess the reverse side: any government adversaries? Do you recall---do you think there might have been any COINTELPRO activity?

Francis Beal: There definitely was because, you know, when people ran---a friend of mine---what's her name. You remember they did that thing on---not KPFA---public television? It was the---essentially a history of the Civil Rights Movement [Eyes On the Prize]. There was the first part and then they were gonna do the second part. I can't remember the name of the thing. Anyway, a woman I know was working on the second thing and she called me and told me that she had gotten papers from FOIA to do the second one and that there was a whole bunch of stuff about me in there, you know, that they got from COINTELPRO stuff. And this particular thing she mentioned had to do with a meeting in which I met with some Panther women because I had been in SNCC and in the Third World Women's Alliance sort of assigned to go and meet with these folks, Panthers, around a meeting they were having down in Washington D.C. and we began to talk about some of the bad relations that exist between some SNCC and some Panther people at that time and that we should probably see if we could do something to ameliorate that. It was just an interesting kind of a thing where they really kept on top of trying to disturb people so they didn't like people talking about "we have to come together".

Q: Right. That's not how divide and conquer works. Yeah, I'm hoping to get some information from FOIA.

Francis Beal: I have no idea. I never wrote away and tried to get stuff from the Third World Women's Alliance. It would be interesting to know if----I did it individually but not from the organization point of view.

Q: Right. Well, I'll let you know if I find something.

Francis Beal: 'Cause those are all the names---how did you do it?

Q: There was something on the Internet about how to go about doing it so I wrote to the FBI and the CIA and, of course, they're both saying they're backlogged and they don't have people assigned---to assign to it. But there was also information about what happens after you get this letter because I think this is just a standard thing they do.

Francis Beal: Right. Well, there's a whole bunch of other kinds of things, too, because we found out that each of the armed forces services had their own intelligence services, too. And, then, local police department, you know? It just went on and on and on. So COINTELPRO was only, like, one program for the FBI. One little program.

Q: I'll have to keep that in mind. Let's see. We're almost done. Did you leave the organization or did it fold? *FB* No, it basically faded away. What happened was there was a point at which we had a big kind of conflict and I do have an account of that and I'll send it to you. It was this guy was trying to agitate within the organization---some people from SNCC. Some guys in SNCC were---anyway, talking about people behind their backs---anyway it was kind of a mess. But we reconstituted after that and what happened I think is we never had full-time staff. We never had a full-time, you know, we did everything after work. People worked and so we were never able to consolidate the organization. We didn't have staff to work it. Everything was on a complete---it was 100% volunteer basis. So when you're young you can work all day and talk all night. We got to the point, though, I mean we were very involved in anti-war stuff, too. That was an important part of the work that we did in terms of---I mean, we went and we met with Vietnamese women when they had a conference in Canada. We were very much involved in organizing for that and encouraging young people not to go and fight in Vietnam and things of that nature. And, like I said, around abortion rights and sterilization abuse. That was a very big, concrete thing. And then the education. A lot of education both for ourselves and then trying to share that. Encouraging courses in college and curricula in schools and that kind of thing. I ended up teaching at the Richmond College and City University of New York. And a number of other women went into---were involved in founding women's studies programs or fighting when black studies departments---to have black women's programs in there. I remember I---an interesting thing that happened: I got a half-time assignment, partly in the women's studies, partly in the black studies department at Richmond College, which is part of the City University of New York and one of the women I taught there with was Barbara Massakelah [sp?] and Barbara Massakelah became Nelson Mandela's assistant and she is today the ambassador from South African to France.

no full-time staff

institutionalized

Q: Wow. Okay.

Francis Beal: And we used to sit in the cafeteria and talk about, "Ah, these men! My god, they don't know what they're doing." And then at the same time, complain about these white women and how racist they are. You know, sometimes you really felt schizophrenic, you know?

cracks of politics

Q: Right. And you need each other to validate---to say we're not.

Francis Beal: Yeah. Anyway, I started to say: it became more and more difficult. Different people---they had babies, they had jobs. It became a little unclear about what we should be doing. So we---and towards the end the only thing we were doing was publishing the paper and that was important in and of itself if we had kind of---I only recognized later that in and of itself that was still an important contribution. And if we had continued to just to that it still would have been an important contribution. We had about 5 or 6,000

circulation which was really quite, you know, quite a lot. But we felt we were, in our minds, we were activists, you know what I mean? And since we weren't---we were very involved in the African Liberation Support Committee [look up]. We were very, very much involved with them. I remember there was a big demonstration. We had like 50,000 people in Washington D.C. around anti-apartheid things that black people had.

So this is what I'm saying: we were involved in how we perceived women had to be free and involved in all these kinds of things that we did involve ourselves in. International anti-imperialist things, anti-war type of activities often promoting and bringing to the fore the role of women all these various struggles. We were involved in anti-racist activities when we---you know, joining with other people in trying to get black studies into the curriculum of schools both at the elementary school level and at the local college level. And doing a lot of educational forums and providing speakers for other forums on this particular subject. So that's sort of the nature of a lot of the work. When we got to the point, though, where we were "only" doing the newspaper, and we were much smaller by that time, we were maybe twenty people by that time, it was very difficult to raise money for the paper. We finally---you know, I went to work for The Guardian newspaper and that was, like, taking up a lot of my time so we were shrinking. So rather than just have it kind of fade and fade, we called a meeting to discuss what should we do about it and people decided that we should---we were really not in the position to continue at that point.

hard to raise money for paper

mtg. to disband group.

Q: And when was that?

Francis Beal: Hmm. It was---I think that was about 1977. But don't forget the Third World Women's Alliance in the West Coast continued. And there I can give you a few names of people, what they did and what they felt about things and what they thought the accomplished.

Q: Where did the money come from? You said you raised money for the paper.

Francis Beal: We had dues. We had different people---we had a level at which people really paid anywhere from \$5-50 a month.

dues

Q: Sliding scale?

Francis Beal: Yeah. But the idea of being self-supporting. We had an office in a church which we did not pay rent for and then we moved and we paid very little rent. We moved in where the African Liberation Support Committee had a place and there was one room in there that we kind of used. That's the point at which we were, like, doing the newspaper essentially.

Q: I guess that would be 1973 with the first newspaper?

Francis Beal: The first paper came out, I believe, in '72.

Q: Okay.

Francis Beal: October/November something like that of '72. September/October was the first issue, I think.

Q: So that's when you moved the office?

Francis Beal: No, we were still in the church then [which church?].

Q: Okay, so it was after '72. And it was still free?

Francis Beal: The church was still free. We had to pay---we basically had to pay for putting out leaflets and stuff. We had no staff, but we had no rent. We used to take collections and then we systematized it a little bit more. Like I said, we---unlike folks today we expected to pay for our own stuff. The very concept of having your hand out for some government grant or something was not yet---we knew that people were not going to, kind of, fund something revolutionary. And we knew that if it was going to happen we would

have to pay for it ourselves and so we had enough. We went around. People were very honest and people gave what they could. And then we systematized it on the month so we knew exactly how much we were going to have coming in. And if people said they couldn't pay---people had to pay something. We felt that people had to show some commitment. Something.

Q: Was there a work requirement or you just trusted people to put in the time they could on the paper?

Francis Beal: Well, we had a lot of---sometimes the executive committee would meet three and four times a week. I mean, we were, like, ultra-left. I mean, we were making a revolution here so we had committee meeting and then general meetings.

Q: Do you know how often you had general meetings?

Francis Beal: Weekly. And then committees met during the week and then the executive committee met in addition to that. This is what I'm saying: just burn out [laughter]. And then there was going to events and things like that. And then we did a lot of political education. We developed classes and courses and gave them to other women in terms of some history and theory. Socialist theory. Some of it was fun because we would read certain things about Lenin and what he thought about women. He had this one thing---we were just breakin'---we did it with a grain of salt. I mean, we had a lot of respect for socialist thought and theory but we did it with a grain of salt, too, you know? So there was this one thing where he's talking about Lenin on the liberation of women and there's an article in there where he's talking about, "Well, Lenin, some of these women are talking about free love. What do you think about that?" And he gives this analogy about "the dirty glass theory". "Well, how would you feel about the dirty glass? You know, you want to drink water..." I said, "This sexist pig!" And you know he had, like, you know that Lenin had this little thing going with this French actress so here he's talking about as far as women---the dirty glass theory. "These young folks they should be involved in sports and things and get all their energies through that. They don't have time to be screwing around." We said, "Oh, god." You can only take these Russians so far. So this is what I'm saying: we were not, you know, we thought we had a lot to learn from some of the Marxist theories and stuff in terms of how society functioned and certain things about class society but like I said, we took some of this with a grain of salt [laughter].

Q: Which a lot of groups didn't do that.

Francis Beal: We were kind of considered a little bit of heretics in that sense. But I think we understood, I personally think we understood it a little bit better than some of them did. That is was a living thing. And I'll never forget that dirty glass theory. It's so funny.

[Discussion of logistics, photocopying and purpose of dissertation]

Francis Beal: But don't forget there were also a lot of radical white women's organizations that you read about, too. 'Cause I remember we got a lot of help when we were going to start our newspaper from Radical Women, Redstockings. That was the name of their organization.

Q: Right definitely [more of me babbling]

Francis Beal: By the way, that is something I should actually tell you. That was the other ideological fight that we had, which was important. We were approached by two lesbians---when was this---and said, "Listen, we want to be completely honest. We're lesbians. There's no organization for us." One was Puerto Rican, one was black. So we had already gone through the Third World Women's Alliance thing. So we had a big discussion about that. Some people said, "Oh, my god. We have enough problems as it is! People are already calling us lesbians." That was another thing. We were lesbian-baited. And so people came---it was interesting. Two people said that they were lesbians and we had this big discussion whether we should do this and some people said no, we shouldn't do it.

Q: Allow them to be in the group?

lesbian
baiting

Francis Beal: Yeah. And finally, like I said, we had all this debate. People were every honest in terms of discussion and feelings and stuff, but finally people said, "In New York, how can we do this? I mean, we can't really turn sisters away. If they agree with the political orientation and purpose of the organization, there's no way that we can be prejudiced." So we came up with this, what I consider now from what I understand about the gay and lesbian movement now, we came up with this very liberal position. Whether it's biological or social---you know, homosexuality---people should not be prejudiced and discriminated against. That was basically the position and that was actually written up as---you probably have that, right?

Q: Right.

Francis Beal: But that was a debate that we had and a couple women left over that. They said, no. They had enough problems as it was. They didn't want to be lesbian-baited. But we had said to them---we were not that nice either. We said, "Well, you understand that this is not going to be [end of tape]

lesbian
straight
split

That's not as bad as what happened on the West Coast. Even though that was the position of the organization and the organization was supposed to be founded on those principles, some of the original women actually were lesbians who founded it out here. That's my understanding. And one of them told me she was asked to leave the organization because she was a lesbian, because they did not want to be associated with that.

Q: They asked one of the founders to leave?

Francis Beal: That's what I hear. And I know---this is the woman---I'll tell you who's the woman who told me that: Paris Williams. So you can get the story from the horse's mouth. Ask her what she, you know, what happened because she's the one that told me this story years later. About two years ago I heard this from her. Anyway, that was the other big debate. I thought we had won that one, but apparently we hadn't because in practice because out here it hadn't really sunk in. It was a big question 'cause we said, "Oh, we're not lesbians." Oh, just because you talk about liberation, you're a lesbian? My god! Give us a break. "You hate men. That's your problem." It was all these ways of not dealing with the concrete question. You know, freedom, liberation, equality, equity. All of those things. If you could just call people names then you didn't have to deal with the subject of the questions that were being raised. You could just call them names.

J